

Ninth Conversation with Professor Wang

Toronto, February 11, 1992

RM: Well, here we are on Tuesday, February 11, 1992. Your most vivid memories as a boy.

TY: Under 12?

RM: Yes.

TY: Well, I told you that I studied in the special room with our tutor, so I didn't mix with my other family members often. One thing that strikes me immediately is the memory that my father didn't care about boys, but my mother loved me very much. Once my father gave me a kiss because I had written a short poem which my elder brother presented to him. He appreciated it very much and said, oh - I'll kiss you once. That was the only kiss I ever got from my father. He didn't care about the sons.

RM: Really!? He preferred the daughters?

TY: Yes. He loved my sisters very much. However, my mother loved me the best.

RM: You were her baby. The youngest.

TY: Well, I was not always the youngest, but was 'in general' the youngest. My one younger brother died at an early age. So I was not really the youngest, but my mother loved me very much. I stayed with my mother from my birth until I was 14 years old. We were very close, we even slept in the same bed.

RM: So your father was more distant.

TY: Distant from the sons, and very serious.

RM: After age 14, what happened?

TY: Well, my father had died when I was 13, so we moved to a smaller house in the inner city. My mother took care of all of us, but our life was quite hard after my father's death. We had three meals a day, two of them were very light and we didn't even have the hard rice with those meals.

RM: How many children were at home?

TY: At that time, there were five. My mother and five children.

RM: Why did your father lose his job?

TY: It was during the tension just after the civil war. The provincial government changed and as a result of this change

in government, all of the high administrative officials were changed, too. My father worked in the Fuzhou for a long time, but because of the change in provincial government, my father had to go. That was 1925, which was the 'Great Revolution' in Chinese history. It was a revolution that came from Canton to Fuzhou. My father had been rather conservative and did not adapt well to the changes made by the revolution, so he retired. As a matter-of-fact, he was fired by the new provincial government.

RM: Did he live very long after that?

TY: No. Only a few years.

RM: The neighborhood in which you lived as a boy. What was that like?

TY: Before my father died, we lived in a house which was entirely isolated from any other houses - an individual house. My father didn't like us to associate with others. Only after my father died did I have the chance to meet people outside of my family.

RM: So you were a very close-knit family?

TY: Yes. The only person who visited us was our tutor and we were

taught privately.

RM: Was your family's situation an unusual one in China at that time?

TY: No, it was a traditional Chinese upbringing. Some of our relatives came to stay with our family, but that was the grown-ups' affairs. Sometimes on my mother's or my father's birthday a lot of our relatives would visit our house, but the young people would be concentrated in other rooms. They would not mix with the adults. One thing that is very interesting is that when I got sick, I would not be sent to the hospital; somebody would take care of me. I would be sent to the family doctor, who had been connected with our family for a long time. I would be taken there by a kind of sitting chair. My father would telephone to our doctor to give his impressions of my illness. Then, I would sit on the chair to our doctor's house and say nothing. Afterwards, the doctor would send the prescription over to our house.

RM: Would he examine you?

TY: Yes. He would take my pulse and do various examinations. It was a kind of mixture of Western and Chinese medicine. Sometimes he would perform acupuncture.

RM: But he cured you!

TY: Yes. Fortunately, I never had any serious illnesses. What impressed me the most is that I never said anything. I would just sit on the chair, be taken to the doctor, put in the examining room and would say nothing. I would just show my hands and open my clothes - that's all!

RM: And he would look at you and prescribe.

TY: Yes.

RM: Well, that's quite a memory. ~~Well~~ let's go on. What happened to your school classmates? You went on to Fudan in Shanghai...

TY: Some of my classmates went with me to Fudan. They studied at Fudan for four years. For me, it was only two years, then I transferred to Qinqhua University. Some of my classmates - about five, I think - went to Xiamen University to study different disciplines. Most of them studied finance, political science and law.

RM: How large was your school?

TY: My class had 25 students, but the whole school was about 400.

There were three classes, with different sections. I was in the section that emphasized economics and business.

RM: So, it seems that quite a few of your classmates went on to university.

TY: I think it was no more than half.

RM: That's pretty good, though.

TY: Well, people in Fujian wanted their children to go to university. Although they were very poor, they would save money for their children to go.

RM: ~~Because~~ They are ~~very~~ education-minded, aren't they?

TY: Yes. Fujian is very education-minded.

RM: In your family - which was a large family - how was it possible for three boys to go to university?

TY: At that time, it was two boys, not three. My sisters didn't have the chance to go to university. Only my elder brother and I went to Fudan, which was terribly hard for my mother. Fortunately, she was such a woman of thrift, she did everything at home. She made our clothes and shoes herself.

Everyday you could see her in our sitting room at the rough table, doing sewing. She also did all the cooking - all to save money so we could go to university.

RM: That must have been a heroic effort on her part.

TY: Yes. She did have a little money that my father had saved. Not cash, but there were a few very small shops. She sold them step-by-step to supply money for our university education.

RM: Did your mother live a long time?

TY: Oh yes! She was 90 years old. She lived through a lot of difficult times. The war under the Japanese occupation prevented her from keeping in touch with me for three or four years. As a matter of fact, I supplied her with money after I graduated from the university. The \$300 fellowship that I mentioned before - I got it upon graduation from the university - I sent her three or four dollars a month, which was only pocket money, really. Fortunately, later on when I was in London, I received £25 a month which made me quite 'rich' for the 1930s! So I would send £4 a month to her. That sum of money would cover her living expenses for the whole month.

RM: Oh! Was she alone in China?

TY: She was with my elder sister who was single until her death. She was a companion to my mother her whole life.

RM: The other children had all grown up and gone away.

TY: One of my elder sisters married a friend of mine and stayed in the area - in Fujian - not in the same house. She is still in Fuzhou and is more than 85.

Some people in Shanghai asked me to write an article on my mother! I didn't have adequate materials, and didn't want to write something without sufficient materials, so I have waited. Maybe someday in the future I will.

RM: We talked a bit about who paid for university...

TY: Yes. Sometimes my older brother, when he came back from Europe, paid the university tuition for me. One of my brothers had a good job in Europe and when he returned, he paid my tuition.

RM: Well, now we're jumping ahead. On your return from Europe, were you able to pick up some of your old friendships?



TY: Of course. I got back in touch with T.C. Chen. I met him in Kunming when I came back through Kunming to Chungking. Also some friends who are now still in Beijing working in the Ministry of Economic Affairs, of course, retired now. The friends I had helped me a lot when I came back from Europe. I couldn't find a university job. I approached some friends who had university jobs, but they told me that there were no positions. It was common in those days for a political science department or a law department to have only one professor of international law on staff. So I went to Chungking unemployed. My friends were the ones who supported me while I was unemployed. I roomed with one of my friends, while the others contributed towards my living expenses and to take care of me. That went on for about five months! Finally, I got an editing job at a journal. It was 1940 when I went to Luosan to teach in Wuhan University. My friends also supported Cai and me so that we could get married. The wedding ceremony was a group effort!

RM: This is a good chance to ask you about Cai's family. She has brothers and sisters?

TY: There are six children in her family. Cai has one brother and four sisters. She is the eldest.

RM: Is Cai's family from Beijing?

TY: Her family comes from Henan, an interior province, but they lived in Beijing for many years. Her father worked in Wuhan and moved to Beijing after that, so she had lived in Beijing most of her life. During wartime, she left Beijing and went to Sichuan to study at Jinlin College. We met at Sichuan College. We were introduced by one of my friends!

RM: And you were married the following year, isn't that right?

TY: Yes! That friend is still in Nanqing teaching in the Engineering College.

RM: Are Cai's brothers and sisters all still living?

TY: All still living. Most of them work in schools or in university colleges, as teachers. Her brother worked in various engineering companies in Shengyan; now he's retired and living in Beijing.

RM: Can we go back to some of the courses that you took and why your inclination was towards the political/legal disciplines as a young student?

TY: Originally, my father wanted me to take up natural sciences, but during my youth - before I was 15 - I hadn't had much of a 'regular' education and hadn't taken many courses in

physics, chemistry, mathematics, or biology. If I had tried to take the examinations for admittance to the natural sciences, I would have failed, so I took the examinations for the social sciences. That was one reason. Another reason was that my family was very strongly concentrated in the the Diplomatic service. My father was a diplomat in one sense, and most of brothers and cousins were involved in diplomatic matters. That gave me the inspiration to study international relations, either the political aspects or the legal aspects. The most important influence on me was during the second year at Fudan University. I mentioned this last time. I took a course offered by a professor of international law. Taking that course sparked my interest in international law, which has remained with me ever since. Hershey's textbook especially made me curious to find out more about international law. Another factor in my youth was that I was very patriotic. My father had such a hard time with the Japanese. During his middle age, it was the time of the immigration crisis in the United States where they barred both Chinese and Japanese from immigrating, so he would not allow any of us to go to the United States. There were incidences of massacres of Chinese immigrants in the U.S., and he told me once very seriously, "You will never go to the United States. I will send my sons to France." It was more liberal there - more equality - "equality, fraterity and freedom" you know, is France's motto. My father's opinion had a strong influence on

me in that matter. The second thing was the Japanese aggression for so many years - 1894 onward. My father would say, "You can see, my sons, I am dealing with these Japanese who are very aggressive towards us and will not treat us as equals." His strong feelings on this cultivated a strong patriotism in me.

RM: These were two indelible impressions made on you.

TY: Yes.

RM: Going back to your schooling, did people regard training in science as superior to training in other disciplines?

TY: Yes. <sup>Science</sup> ~~It~~ was well-regarded, but the department for sciences in Fuzhou was not very strong. They put more emphasis on literature, foreign languages, and history, for example. There were a number of very well-known Fuzhou scholars in Beijing University, all in the social sciences department.

RM: ~~I see~~ And you are ~~one~~ <sup>also</sup> of that tradition?

TY: Yes. You know, it <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ very interesting. The <sup>three</sup> most important three international lawyers came from Fuzhou. You know two: T.C. Chen and me. The third and eldest one was Professor Shao, who died unfortunately when he was about 60. These are

three of the most important scholars in public international law.

RM: Do you think that is because of the strong tradition in Fuzhou in the social sciences?

TY: It was not Fuzhou, but these three were all educated in Qinghua.

RM: Qinghua! I see.

TY: The eldest, Professor Shao, graduated in 1931. I graduated in 1933, and Professor Chen graduated in 1938. Unfortunately T.C. Chen also passed away much too early. He was my friend from the time I was in graduate school. He was an undergrad, but we became strong friends during my studies there.

RM: He was a splendid person. I remember when he visited Dalhousie, I visited him at Harvard one time, and of course, I ~~met~~<sup>met</sup> his wife, Fan Ying. ~~Would you say~~ Would you say that the life for young people in China has changed very much over the last 50 years?

TY: Yes. Students nowadays are much more active than in the past.

RM: So there are many more possibilities?

TY: What do you mean by possibilities?

RM: Well....

TY: They have a better chance for regular education. They can go through a whole system of middle school, high school and to university, if they choose.

RM: In your day, it was not as accessible.

TY: No. Not possible. Not everyone could be a student at a university or a college.

RM: Coming back now to how you viewed the outside world. You mentioned these two influences on you from your father. How else did you perceive the outside world?

TY: In Fuzhou, the perspective the students had was rather narrow, because they studied at school to the exclusion of the outside world. For instance, students wouldn't read the newspaper everyday. One thing that strikes me also was the influence that communists had when they came to Fuzhou during the 1920s. There was some inspiration from the Communist Party which was very strongly against the Kuomintang rule. A fact that was very important in the minds of the students.

RM: A point very important for you and for your generation.

TY: Yes. Of course we did not have any contact with foreigners.  
We had the impression - **TAPE CUT OFF HERE.**

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RM: *Handwritten: If you would* Tell ~~me~~<sup>me</sup> a little bit about the Cultural Revolution and how it affected you and how it affected Cai and your family.

TY: Very serious. In the early days of the Cultural Revolution I was confined to a room in the students' dormitory where I had to make confessions. It was a very small room under the control of the students who were members of the Red Guard. I wasn't permitted to do anything else. Eventually, Cai and I were sent to Jiangxi Province to a concentration camp. We were forced to do manual work every day for a whole year. It was both physical and spiritual oppression. My oldest daughter was also sent to the countryside. My second daughter and Ting remained in Beijing, without any assistance from anyone. We were unable to do anything for them.

RM: What sort of manual work was it that you were doing?

TY: It was a variety. Everything and anything related to planting

rice in the fields.

RM: You were working in a rice field?

TY: Yes. It was very dirty work. We would go to the fields early in the morning and work until dark. It was exhausting work and you would get quite muddy, as you know, rice fields are completely irrigated. In the summer time, we would work under the hot sun and the temperature often would reach 40°C. In the winter, Jiangxi Province was rather cold. Our housing had no heat of course, and we weren't given enough bedding or garments to protect us from the cold.

RM: This went on for over a year?

TY: Actually, it was almost two years.

RM: Was Cai doing the same work?

TY: She started out doing work in the fields, but ended up getting better treatment. She later was transferred to work in the kitchens, preparing food for everyone in the camp.

RM: Terrible. Has there ever been any <sup>official</sup> explanation of the Cultural Revolution - as to what its purpose was?



TY: The real reason for the Cultural Revolution was that there was a struggle in the high levels of central authorities. Mao Tse Tung had taken a stand against Liu Shao Shi, so he would stir up the Revolution for punishing him and his group. Another reason was that they wanted to punish the intelligentsia. At that time, a perception existed that scholars were against the government. He thought it was better to force us to do manual labour and separate us from our academic pursuits.

~~I saw a very interesting film.~~

You know, during that time, the man who was responsible for the admission of the students only made them show him their hands. If the student's hands were rough, he/she would be allowed to be admitted to the university. If not, they would not be admitted. The understanding was that if your hands were rough, you were the descendant of workers and peasants; otherwise, you were a member of the intelligentsia, and therefore, inadmissible. During our work in the concentration camp, one day they called all the professors to a meeting where they ridiculed and criticized us. There was a very well-known professor of physics to whom they asked, do you know how to drive a car? The professor said, no, I don't even own a car. They shouted: A professor of physics who doesn't know how to drive a car!? How shameful! To another well-know professor of biology they asked, do you know how to plant watermelon? He said, No, I have no such experience. They

shouted again: It is shameful! Such a great professor of biology can't even plant a watermelon! Their questions reflected the Authorities' way of thinking at the time: intellectuals didn't have any practical skills; they should do manual work and not work in laboratories or libraries. Of course during that time, all schools and universities were closed up.

RM: How many were there in the camp where you were? Were there many professors?

TY: There were nearly 1,000 professors, teachers and staff, with their families. I was there with Cai because she was a library staff member.

RM: What a terrible experience.

TY: Yes. You can't begin to imagine what kind of life we had.

RM: When you first had to go there, how did you leave Beijing?

TY: It was organized by the revolutionaries. We all had to take the same train.

RM: How did they tell you about this? You were living in the house that I saw, right? Your regular house... and somebody

came and told you that you must leave?

TY: Yes. A person came to tell us that we were required to gather at the university compound and we would be going to the station collectively.

RM: What happened to your house and your furniture?

TY: Originally, my family had two units. They cancelled one of them and in the remaining unit, we were confined to one room.

RM: While you were were gone, did they still allow you to keep that as your house?

TY: Yes, but it had been reduced to one room.

RM: So when you came back, you went back to that one room.

TY: Yes. Things had changed, however. All my books had been confiscated and sealed up in a room with a notice posted across the door "PROHIBITED TO OPEN". We couldn't do anything about it.

RM: Did many people die in these camps?

TY: ~~Yes~~. Not many, but some. They died as a result of the hard

work and also there was a parasite - called a blood fluke - some people got from the water.

RM: Could we have one last thing, then. Your Hong Kong Commission, what was the proper name of it and when was it established?

TY: The proper name is the Drafting Committee of the Basic Law of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. It was established in 1984.

RM: Has your work been completed?

TY: Yes. It was completed when the Basic Law was adopted by the National People's Congress.

RM: What date was that?

TY: That was the year before last in April. It was April, 1990.

RM: Maybe next time we can talk about that. I think you went to Hong Kong on several occasions...

TY: Actually, I was in Hong Kong only once, but we also went to Quanzhou and a few other places in China several times for the meetings of the Committee.

RM: So we'll save that for our next conversation.